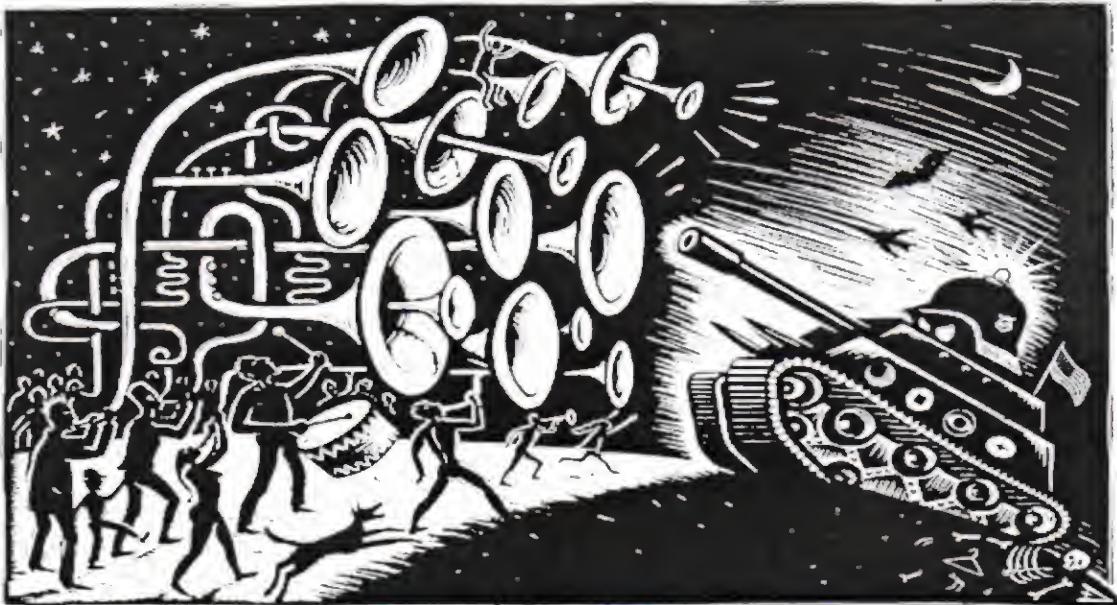


Movement for a Participatory Economy: An Overview

by Michael Albert



Besides immediate objectives, great social movements need long-run goals for inspiration and guidance. The abolitionist movement to end slavery and the movement for the eight-hour day both in the nineteenth century, the movement for women's suffrage at the turn of the century, the labor movement that led to the CIO in the 1930s, the civil rights, student, and peace movements seeking to expand justice in the 1960s, and the women's liberation movement in the 1970s all bear out the point.

What about a 21st century movement to replace greedy competition with equitable cooperation? For that we will need visionary long-run goals as well as a battle plan of immediate objectives. In twelve commentaries over the next few months, I will suggest some long-run goals and some immediate objectives that might help define a mass movement seeking a "participatory economy." Four themes for further exploration will be central.

- Just Rewards
- Self Management
- Dignified Work
- Participatory Allocation

Just Rewards

In the U.S. and all other countries vast differentials in income and wealth stem from numerous factors. Why should we favor massive redistribution of wealth and remuneration according to only effort and sacrifice as Just Reward, instead of permitting huge disparities of wealth and rewarding according to profit, power, or output?

Why should we want Bill Gates to lose his vast wealth and then earn only for work that he does and for how hard it is, but not for having contributed to the design or creation of a vast productive apparatus?

Why should we want surgeons and coal miners to earn only for the time they work and for how hard they work and for how much sacrifice is involved in their work, but not for the number of lives they save or the tons of coal they extract?

The first step in arguing for Just Rewards is elaborating the moral and economic grounds for advocating rewarding only effort and sacrifice. If we can answer the above questions and agree on the norm in a first commentary on the subject, the second step will be to consider how to fight for Just Rewards?

We would clearly need to fight to reduce and ultimately eliminate pay differentials based on race or gender, reduce and ultimately eliminate reward for property, power, and/or contribution to output, and finally correlate rewards that people receive to the levels of effort and sacrifice they actually expend. To create a program furthering these ends a second commentary on Just Rewards will advocate such reforms as affirmative action; profit, property, wealth, inheritance, and income taxes; and a full employment program, minimum wage supports, increased social wage payments, reverse income taxes, and many job actions for increased wages, among other immediate objectives.

Self-Management

In contemporary societies, people at the top of corporations and government bureaucracies have vast economic power. Others mostly obey. Why should we aim to level these power differentials and seek self-management, defined as decision-making input proportionate to the degree one is affected by outcomes? Why not aim for “economic freedom,” giving everyone the right to do whatever they wish with themselves and their property? Or why not seek simple democracy, giving everyone equal say over all economic decisions? Or why not seek meritocracy, giving the more knowledgeable or more successful more say than those who are less knowledgeable or less successful?

If we can answer these questions and decide that Self Management is the best aim, do we need new institutions like workers’ and consumers’ councils and federations to achieve it? Do we need new rules for discussion and voting within councils and federations? What changes in current workplace and consumption relations, and what changes in the generation and distribution of information about the economy, will move us toward self-management?

One commentary in this series of twelve will defend self-management as the best decision making goal for a Movement for Participatory Economy. A second commentary in the series will explore ways to achieve self-managed decision-making including strategies to legitimate and create workers and consumers councils, ideas for changes in decision-making procedures within workplaces, and demands to replace private decision-making over collective consumption with democratic procedures and that increase consumers' power over what is produced.

Dignified Work

Nowadays some folks don't work at all, suffering harsh unemployment. Other folks suffer degrading conditions and have no say in what they do. Still others have plush jobs, uplifting conditions, and lots of say in their work, and over other people's work too. If that isn't fair, which ought to be evident, than what should we seek instead? What constitutes dignified work? What should be the distribution of tasks among economic actors so that each actor has a fair job situation? Why should we reject having a few jobs at the top that have way more quality of life and empowerment effects and vast numbers of jobs at the bottom that have few if any quality of life and empowerment effects? A first commentary on dignified work will argue that every worker should enjoy comparable quality of life and empowerment effects in their work as one of our primary economic goals-a "balanced job complex."

Then, having agreed that dignified work entails each worker having a fair mix of empowering and uplifting as well as boring and rote labor so there is no class division between those monopolizing empowering work and those following orders, and having countered fears that such a choice will reduce output by diminishing expertise, what demands should we then make about job definitions, information, knowledge, and training that will lead toward balanced job complexes for all? We would certainly need to compensate those with less desirable work with time off that they can use for further schooling or other efforts to attain better circumstances. And we would need to require those with more desirable jobs to spend compensating time doing onerous work as well. And finally, as workers' organization and power to influence their conditions grows and as their capacity to demand serious changes in workplace relations increases, we would favor reforms seeking to reduce disparities in desirability and empowerment between different jobs by reallocating tasks between them.

Participatory Allocation

When different groups of workers make different products some procedure for coordinating their activities with each other and with the desires of consumers is required. Economic allocation determines how much of each input and output is used or produced and where it winds up. Partly economic allocation is a matter of decisions; partly it is a matter of information, communication, and behavioral roles. Currently producers and consumers relate to one another as enemies in markets where competitive pressures drive them to try and take advantage of one another, or to be replaced by someone else that

does. But acceding to the economics of competition and greed is not the only way workers and consumers can coordinate their related activities to enjoy the advantages of a division of labor. Instead they can consciously plan how to coordinate their efforts – democratically, equitably, and efficiently.

A first commentary about participatory allocation will motivate and explain how workers and consumers can allocate scarce productive resources and distribute goods and services without markets and their pernicious effects, by using a decentralized, social planning procedure we call “participatory planning” in which workers and consumers councils and federations propose and revise their own activities in socially responsible ways. It will summarize the advantages of participatory planning over both markets and the discredited system of central, or command planning, and explain why fears that such participatory planning would prove inefficient or limit legitimate freedoms are misplaced. A second commentary in the series will discuss demands for restricting the influence of market forces and expanding the role of equitable cooperation by banning involuntary overtime, reducing the work week, imposing tax and budget reforms, and expanding public influence over investment and budget decisions.

A Word About Vision and Program

Having goals can help us recognize current injustice, spur our motivation, and orient our actions toward reaching preferred destination. Demands we choose in the present and tactics we employ to try to win them have a dual logic. On the one hand, they seek to reduce current suffering. On the other hand, they seek to move us toward future long-run goals. In the latter capacity demands and tactics should augment our strengths and reduce those of our opponents. They should increase the numbers seeking change, increase the understanding and commitment of advocates of change, strengthen dissident organizations and means of outreach and struggle, and win gains that not only improve the lot of progressive constituencies, but also empower them to win further gains and become ever more committed and capable. These are the standards we should embrace as we discuss short-term economic program. They are simple to summarize, but nonetheless central to social strategy

Just Rewards

In a desirable economy what income does each actor get to enjoy? What is the basis for remuneration?

Rewarding Property?

I doubt that many folks reading this commentary think people should be rewarded due to owning property. This is called profit...and in this case individuals own means of production and pocket profit based on the output of those means of production. This leads to someone like Bill Gates having more wealth than the entire GNP of Norway, or, if you prefer, 475 billionaires together having more wealth than half the world's population.

Being born rich due to inherited property doesn't reward a person for something worthy that he or she has done nor even provide incentive to do something he or she otherwise might not have done. There is thus no moral or economic rationale for it other than aggrandizing the few.

Rewarding Power?

Folks reading this probably also don't think people should be rewarded based on their ability to extort a greater share of society's product due to their power. A thuggish economic actor – using racism or sexism or a monopoly on some asset – shouldn't be able to translate that power into income. Sure, in an economy where extortion is a norm we wouldn't want to say that that unions shouldn't be allowed to demand and use their power to win higher wages against the power of owners and others. But in a good economy where everyone is subject to new norms and not battling for advantage, surely we agree that we wouldn't want owners or unions or any other actors to be gaining income based on relative power. Rewarding power is no more moral ethical or economically efficient than rewarding ownership.

Rewarding Output?

Leftist controversy over what is "Just Reward" arises, if at all, regarding the possibility of rewarding output. A perfectly sensible and humane person reading this essay might think, roughly, each economic actor ought to get back a share of output equal in value to what they themselves produce for the economy. This has even been the slogan of very radical movements – the Wobblies, for example. And it seems fair: If you don't put much into society's economic product, you shouldn't take much out. If you put a lot in, you should take a lot out. Otherwise, someone else gets value you put in, or you get value someone else put in, instead of each of getting back only the amount of our own contribution.

But, suppose Sally and Sam are picking oranges. Sally has a good set of tools. Sam has a crummy old set. They go into the fields for eight hours. They work equally hard. They endure the same conditions. Sally's pile when the day is done is twice as big as Sam's. Should Sally get twice Sam's income? If she does, we have rewarded her luck in having better tools. Is that moral or, efficient?

Suppose Sally is very large and strong and Sam is much smaller and weaker. They have the same tools. They again go into the fields for eight hours. They again work equally hard. They again endure the same conditions. Sally's pile is again twice Sam's. Should Sally get twice Sam's income? If she does, we have rewarded her luck in the genetic lottery: her size and strength. Is that moral or efficient?

Now suppose we compare two people doing mathematics investigations, or creating works of art, or doing surgery, or doing anything else socially desirable. They work equally hard under the same conditions. One has more of some relevant natural talent and the other has less of it. Should the former be rewarded commensurately more than the latter? Clearly, there is no moral reason to do so. Why reward someone for genetic luck

on top of the benefits the luck already bestowed them? More controversially and interestingly, there is also no incentive reason to do it. A potential recipient of bounty for innate talent cannot change her natural talent in response to the promise of higher pay. The natural endowment is what it is, and being paid for it won't cause us to change our genes to increase it. There is no positive incentive effect.

But how about education, or learned skills? Shouldn't our improving our productivity be morally rewarded, and also to promote it? That seems reasonable - but not in proportion to the output the education permits, rather in proportion to the effort and sacrifice it required. We should reward for the act undertaken, such as "enduring" schooling. We should provide proper incentive for undertaking that act. But that is very different than looking at lifetime output and saying we will reward in accord with that.

Rewarding Only Effort and Sacrifice!

Suppose we reward effort and sacrifice, not property, power, or output. What happens? Well, if jobs were like now, those doing the most onerous or dangerous or otherwise debilitating work would be highest paid per hour of normal effort. Those with the most comfortable conditions and circumstances would be lowest paid per hour of normal effort.

But shouldn't a surgeon get paid for all those years of schooling, as compared to a nurse or a janitor, say, who has less schooling?

Sure. Whatever the level of effort and sacrifice the years of schooling entailed, the surgeon should be paid for that while schooling herself. Later, the surgeon should be paid in accord with the effort and sacrifice expended at work just like the janitor in the hospital should. In this event, each person should be rewarded according to the same norm - paid according to effort and sacrifice expended at a worthwhile job that contributes to society.

But then no one will be a surgeon, is the reply. Folks will prefer being a janitor.

Why? Imagine you are just out of college. You now have to choose - will it be medical school for six years followed by being a doctor for forty, or would you prefer being a janitor in the local hospital for the full forty-six years. More exactly, how much do you have to be paid to go to medical school instead of being a janitor for the first six years, in light of the quality of life you will have then and later? Or, vice versa, how much would you have to be paid to opt to be a janitor for the first six years rather than to go to medical school? And then, how much would you need to be paid to do either of the jobs as compared to the other for the remaining forty years?

To ask these questions is to answer them and to reveal that the motivational effects of payment according to effort and sacrifice are exactly right if we are discussing a world in which people are free to choose their jobs without encumbrances from history or limiting institutions. Of course not everyone will seek these specific jobs, but the thought

experiment is easy to translate to all other realms.

In short, other things equal and all options open, you need and deserve more pay to provide you the incentive to do that which requires greater effort and sacrifice-way more to be a janitor than a student. But you don't need nor do you deserve more pay to do something that is more fulfilling, more empowering, or yields more output, assuming it doesn't require greater effort and sacrifice-you need less to be a doctor than a janitor.

Just Reward is that those who put out more effort and sacrifice at a needed set of tasks for society get more income. Those who put out less for society, get less income. That's the goal we propose for a participatory economy: Just Rewards or payment according to effort and sacrifice.

And what if someone can't exert due to health or other reasons?

Even wage slave economies recognize that in such cases there ought to be remuneration anyway. Reasonable people could differ about how much, of course, but the average income in a just society would seem proper.

And what if someone has some ailment requiring expensive treatments, or suffers some calamity - natural or otherwise, that destroys their holdings?

Of course, a just society addresses these needs socially, insuring against them for everyone, socially, and not leaving individuals to suffer them alone.

And what about children who can't/shouldn't work? Are they dependent on the income of parents so that parents with three children have less per person than those with one child or none?

No, children's income is like that of anyone else who is unable to work, it is average and rewarded socially, simply for being human.

So in light of the above examples, we have a caveat: the goal is Just Rewards, which is payment according to effort and sacrifice or according to need when effort cannot be expended or need is excessive due to disease or other calamity.

A Program Seeking Just Rewards

Suppose we agree that people ought to be paid only according to how hard they work and how onerous their work conditions are. To attain these Just Rewards we must reduce and ultimately eliminate reward for property, power, and output; reduce and finally eliminate the impact of race and gender on remuneration; and increase reward for effort and sacrifice to appropriate levels.

Income Redistribution

A few percent of people in the U.S. economy receive exorbitant income from capital. At the extreme, people like Bill Gates earn many billions yearly. At the bottom, millions of householders earn modest returns from small stock holdings. About 20 percent of the population monopolizes productive skills, decision-making levers, and other variables enhancing their bargaining power. At the high end of this group athletes and movie stars earn tens of millions of dollars yearly. More typically folks who monopolize the levers of day-to-day decision making and largely control and define their own work and often that of others – including doctors, lawyers, managers, high level engineers, and elite university faculty, among others – earn yearly incomes ranging from roughly \$80,000 to \$500,000 and sometimes much more. It is hard to figure an average for this “coordinator class,” but \$300,000 a year is probably indicative.

The top one percent of the population holds about 40% of the wealth in the U.S. Bill Gates alone has just a bit more wealth than Zimbabwe, Ghana, Iceland, Panama, Costa Rica, Kenya, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic combined. The next 9% holds another 33% so that the top 10% holds just under three-quarters of the wealth of society. The next 10% holds about 11.5%. The next 40% holds about 15%. The last 40% of the population holds about one half a percent of the wealth. Similarly, the average pay in the top twenty percent is about eight times the average in the bottom 40%. The average pay in the top 1% is over 30 times the average in the bottom 40%. The average U.S. CEO made 209 times the pay of factory workers in 1996.

Our first demands for Just Rewards seek to take some of the income or wealth from the capitalist and coordinator classes and redistribute it either to the general social good, or directly to the most needy in society. Here are some typical options.

Profit Taxes

Profit taxes take wealth that oughtn’t accrue to some folks and return it to the social pot, thereby reducing excessive disparities. The ultimate is a 100% profit tax since profit does not reward effort or sacrifice. However, in addition to an ultimate goal, we need short-term demands, attainable in the present while aiming for the future. It is like building a skyscraper: You don’t erect girders for the top floors before you lay them for the lower floors. Just as the first tasks in building a skyscraper need to support those that come later, winning short-term economic demands needs to reward deserving constituencies and also strengthen their dissent and empower them to win more in the future. A movement for a participatory economy might sensibly demand a 50% profit tax.

Wealth, Inheritance, and Luxury Goods Taxes

A wealth tax makes it hard to retain great wealth. An inheritance tax makes it hard to bequeath great wealth to offspring. A luxury tax takes a cut whenever someone buys something beyond what most people can afford. Again, a 100% inheritance tax above some level makes moral sense, as does a high wealth tax that reduces holdings before they are bequeathed. And revenues from both these taxes could finance desirable public programs in health care, education, communication, etc. In a few years even a 30%

wealth tax would greatly reduce disparities and generate public funds to rid society of homelessness, hunger, inadequate schools, and other offensive features.

Income Taxes

Income due to institutional, organizational, or personal advantages also violates the norm to remunerate only effort and sacrifice and is therefore neither moral nor efficient. As one way to move toward Just Rewards regarding income, a movement for a participatory economy might demand highly graduated income taxes.

With all the above tax proposals it is essential that government isn't spending tax revenues on welfare for the rich, giving it all back to the wealthiest sectors. Rather the demand needs to be to rebuild inner cities, develop public health systems, improve public education, etc.

Affirmative Action

Beyond owning capital and monopolizing conditions or skills that enhance bargaining power, racism and sexism also distort remuneration in many societies.

While the typical white household in the U.S. had \$18,000 in financial wealth (net worth minus equity in owner-occupied housing) in 1995 (the latest year for which complete figures are available), the typical black household had just \$200 and the typical Hispanic household had zero. Similarly, in 1991, 39.2 percent of white American households had incomes less than \$25,000, but among Hispanics 54.4 percent were below \$25,000, and for black Americans 60.6 percent were less than \$25,000.

Similarly, women who work outside the home earn only 62% as much as men, which is up from 47% in 1980 and from 38% in 1970 (struggle does pay off), but still obviously inadequate. Women who work full-time earn three-quarters of what men do, up from the three-fifths that prevailed through most of the 1970s.

Likewise, despite great advances in the past forty years, people of different races and genders still don't generally get comparable work. Instead, by a variety of mechanisms jobs are often allocated on the basis of race or gender. In that sense, the culture and conditions of U.S. employment have for a long time acted as a kind of "affirmative action" for whites and men.

Demands that reduce and ultimately eliminate race and gender effects on income are ones that equalize pay for comparable work, that remove barriers to entry to better jobs, and that facilitate entry to fields with currently skewed participation. Typically advocates of existing relations try to portray affirmative action in ways that divide workers from one another. One obvious solution is to have affirmative action both for overcoming caste oppression (race and gender) and class oppression as well. A second solution is to finance affirmative action out of funds redistributed from the top, coupling affirmative action with demands for full employment, etc., so it won't result in worsening conditions for

white male workers already suffering the impoverishment and indignities of capitalism.

Proper Remuneration

Beneath capitalists and coordinators in modern capitalist economies are normal workers who lack capital, lack inflated bargaining power, work without significant say over their conditions, follow orders given by others, and are rarely remunerated at an appropriate rate for their effort and sacrifice. Perhaps one out of five adults in the United States fall in the coordinator or capitalist classes. The remaining four fifths – the working class – receive relatively meager income and accumulate minimal wealth despite that they expend more effort and sacrifice in their work than coordinators and capitalists (or suffer unemployment, which is even worse). The third set of programmatic demands for Just Rewards seeks to raise remuneration for those being paid little, but expending great effort and sacrifice in work. There are many approaches.

Full Employment

Part of the income accruing from various taxes should support government full employment policies that will have the following beneficial results: (1) the unemployed gain employment and income, (2) all workers benefit from increased bargaining power due to reduced fear of being fired, and (3) society benefits from additional output guided by social choice and not profit-seeking, as we will see in future commentaries on economic program.

Minimum Wage Supports

Increasing the minimum wage, in conjunction with attaining full employment, puts a floor on personal income. However, minimum wage jobs are almost always the most onerous. Thus, if we were to reward only effort and sacrifice, they should be the highest paid in society, not the lowest. Still, short-run program must move in the right direction before it can gather momentum and finally win magnificent new structures. Thus a demand for a minimum wage that is 60% of the average income for the economy would seem like a good short term demand. To howls that this would bankrupt many businesses, an answer might be to reduce payroll at higher levels and to use accrued profit and property taxes to subsidize worthy smaller operations made “needy” by the program.

Social Wage Payments

The “social wage” is a loose term for government policies that benefit working people. This includes expenditures on public health care, education, housing, and infrastructure, or even price supports on goods or food so as to reduce income demands on the poor. Policies which increase allocations for the “Social Wage” redistribute society’s product to benefit those in need, and thus also move society toward Just Rewards.

Reverse Income Taxes

Just as it is possible to collect taxes, it is also possible to pay reverse taxes. Since our economy doesn't directly remunerate according to effort and sacrifice, the government can "tax and pay" to correct the deviations, not only taking away from those who are over-rewarded, but also paying out to those who are under-rewarded. The ideal demand is for a socially regulated accounting of job types that generates a measure of their broad implications for effort and sacrifice, plus a reverse payment for those that are under-remunerated by the market system. In this manner the funds accrued from profit, wealth, luxury, inheritance, and income taxes can be redistributed not only to social wage payments for public education, health care, etc., but also as reverse taxes paid directly to workers earning less than their job requirements warrant.

Job Actions for Higher Wages

Naturally, a program seeking participatory economics will also support union and rank and file efforts to win higher wages by direct actions, strikes, etc. This not only raises incomes that are currently too low, it can cut into those that are too high, and it should involve activism that prepares the organizational means and workers commitment to win further gains.

Fighting for Just Rewards in a Movement for Participatory Economics

Finally, a movement that seeks Just Rewards in society has to practice what it preaches. This is necessary (a) to be believable, (b) to expand its own understanding of what its aims entail, (c) to provide hope through its internal practice, and (d) to welcome and nurture diverse participation. This last is especially important but rarely enunciated. What underpaid person would believe in the efficacy or the honesty of a movement that talks about attaining Just Rewards in society, but doesn't practice Just Rewards internally? A consistent movement for a participatory economy should have its own internal dues financing and wage rates exceed its Just Reward demands for society.

Self-Management as a Goal

How much say should each actor in an economy have over decisions in that economy? Why should we aim for self-management defined as decision-making input proportionate to the degree one is affected by outcomes? Why not aim for "economic freedom" defined as the right to do whatever one wishes with one's person and property? Or why not give everyone equal say over all economic decisions all the time? Or why not permit the more knowledgeable or successful more say than those who are less knowledgeable or less successful?

Decision Settings

Consider a worker in a plant. Suppose he has his own work area. He wants to put a picture of his daughter on the wall. How much say should he have? How much say should

I have about his daughter's picture if I work across the plant in another division or even across town?

Suppose another worker wants to play Punk Rock all day long in her area. How much say over that should she have? And how much should I have if I work just a little way up the floor from her, well within the "hearing zone"? What if I work across town?

Suppose a group is deciding a shared schedule. How much say should each member have? What about folks who use the group's outputs in another part of the plant? What about folks who consume the plant's products across town or on the other side of the country?

Or suppose you live near my plant...what say should you have relative to me about the noise emanating from my plant into your neighborhood? Suppose that you consume products that I help produce. How much say should you have about what the plant produces, about our choices for organization and output?

Self Management

It's obvious that no single decision-making method is always best. A worker ought to have dictatorial say over the picture of his daughter. From the next cubicle, I should have a veto over a worker's option to play Punk in her area all day. A work group should have most say about its operational choices, but groups that consume its product should have some say as well, in proportion to the extent they are affected.

Decisions often differ in how much they affect different individuals or constituencies. Seen in this light, one-person one-vote majority rule, or two-thirds rule, or consensus decision-making, or dictatorship, and any other particular decision-making methodology are tactical options for reaching some norm or other, rather than being ends in themselves. To enshrine a single decision-making method as always applicable ignores that different tactics do better in different situations, even for accomplishing the same favored norm.

To choose decision-making tactics or methods based on how appropriate they are to best accomplish a preferred norm depending on different contexts, therefore makes good sense. But what norm should we regularly aspire to? Ordinarily, when we spontaneously decide how to make specific decisions in daily life, assuming we respect everyone involved and aspire to democracy, we automatically try to give each actor a say proportionate to the degree they are affected. While we can't always perfectly attain this type of self-management in which everyone has decision-making input proportionate to the degree they are affected by outcomes, any deviation from it means at least one person is having excessive impact while at least one other person is denied their share.

Are there sometimes good reasons to violate proportionate input for all? Suppose there is a sudden announcement that a tidal wave is heading our way. One of us is a tidal wave survival expert, the rest are city-folk who know nothing about the matter. A quick shift to dictatorship is prudent. Does this insight abrogate the above natural inclination to

advocate decision-making input in proportion to effect as our guiding norm for a good economy? Does it suggest instead adopting decision-making input in accordance with relevant knowledge?

Knowledge and Decisions

Relevant knowledge for decisions comes in two forms. (1) There is knowledge of the character of the decision and its context and of its most likely implications. And (2) there is also knowledge of how each person feels about those implications and specifically how they value the various options. The first type knowledge is often quite specialized, as in the case of the tidal wave hero who has a complete monopoly on it. But the second type knowledge is always dispersed since we are each individually the world's foremost experts regarding our own personal valuations. I know best that I don't want to drown. I am the world's foremost expert regarding my valuations, you are regarding yours, and Shawn, Sally, Sue, Sam, and Samantha are regarding theirs. So whenever the conclusions of specialized knowledge about implications can be disseminated sufficiently that each actor can assess the situation and arrive at their own view in ample time to express it for the decision, each actor should have impact proportionately to the effects they will endure. Whenever that's impossible for some reason, then we may need to temporarily function according to a different norm that cedes some authority for a time, though in ways that don't subvert the prior aim more broadly. Obviously the burden of proof is on deviating from what is most desirable, and the implication for distributing knowledge to permit self-management is evident.

In short, the fact that you are a chemist and understand the chemistry and biology of lead paint whereas I am a painter or auto-maker and do not, doesn't mean you get to decide disproportionately whether my walls have lead paint or whether our whole community permits or rejects lead paint. It does mean, however, that I and my fellow community members should listen to your expert testimony before making a decision. But in the decision-making per se, you are like everyone else. You have a say proportionate to the effect on you, just as we have a say proportionate to the effect on us.

Councils and Other Implications

So the self-management goal is that each actor influences decisions in proportion as he or she is affected. To accomplish this, each actor must have easy access to the relevant analysis of anticipated outcomes and must have sufficient general knowledge and intellectual confidence to understand it and develop preferences in light of it. Society's organization should insure that the sources of analysis are unbiased. Thus each individual or group involved in a decision must have organizational means to arrive at and to make known their desires, as well as the means to tally them sensibly.

In the economy, we thus need various levels of workers and consumers councils—as decision-making vehicles for different size collectives of workers and consumers. Thus, work-group, division, workplace, industry, and living group, neighborhood, community, and county councils are needed as vehicles for expressing individual and group

preferences, voting by various means, implementing results, etc. We also need information dispersal that provides the knowledge necessary for informed judgments about economic interactions by those affected. We need, also, that each actor has personal confidence and is sufficiently empowered that they feel comfortable arriving at a preference, expressing it, arguing on behalf of it, and voting for it. And we need a means of allocation and other institutional interactions that abides the self management norm and fulfills these requirements.

There are thus many institutional implications of striving for decision-making influence in proportion to the extent one is affected, and discerning even the major ones takes some doing. But the principle itself is straightforward. Next Commentary: a program of demands and actions aimed directly at fostering economic self-management. Further commentaries will address additional features that bear on this aim as well, however—such as workplace organization and how allocation occurs.

A Program Seeking Self-Management

Agreeing that self-management, or decision making input in proportion as one is affected, is a core goal for a participatory economic movement, what demands can we fight for today that will help move us toward self-management tomorrow?

1. We can create workers and consumers councils

For each worker in some workplace or industry or each consumer in a neighborhood or county to have a private opinion isolated from her workmates or neighbors will accomplish little. Instead, to make joint decisions and seek new relations, workers and consumers need to meet together to hash out their views, arrive at collective desires, and advocate preferred options.

Democratic councils are local institutions workers and consumers use to pursue collective agendas. As a first step to creating worker and consumer councils, meeting to discuss the council idea is a good place to start. Moving on to formalize council rules and agree on a local program lays a foundation for workers and consumers to seek changes regarding everything from wages and conditions to budgets and investments, refining their agendas in accord with their on-going experiences.

2. We can democratize information access

You can't make good decisions without access to the information that informed decision-making depends on. If you have a right to vote, but you lack information bearing on the options you face, the vote becomes a charade. To participate intelligently, people need information about the decisions that affect them. Efforts to "open the books" in workplaces and regarding city, county, state, and national budgets promote self-management. More, demanding that the information be packaged in readily available and comprehensible ways, and the right to access it during paid work-time rather than at leisure, also furthers self management.

3. We can democratize workplace decision-making

Having councils with informed members creates the possibility to struggle for gains around wages, conditions, prices, investments, and all of economic life. But why should workers and consumers struggle anew for their desires each time around? What about winning the right to impact decisions directly, rather than only by virtue of a long, debilitating struggle?

It is good for workers councils (or unions) to mount a campaign to coerce decision-makers to raise wages and improve conditions. And it is similarly good for consumers councils or movements to coerce government to alter its budget allotments and enact pollution controls. But it would also be good for either workers' or consumers' councils to meet as part of their members' normal daily responsibilities and calmly raise wages, improve conditions, or alter budgets by virtue of their authorized power in decision-making, without having to fight about it.

In other words, in addition to winning gains via council and union struggles, democratizing economic decision-making requires winning sanctioned power for councils in the actual decision-making process itself. This can range from the modest gain of having a council representative or two at industry or government meetings for reporting purposes, to winning some voting rights at such meetings, to winning full empowerment over and above any other sectors of the workplace or government regarding economic decisions.

In short, we fight over conditions and other reforms, of course, but we also fight over the nature of the contest itself, over the rules of conflict.

4. We can increase consumers' power over production

What a workplace produces and whether it uses one or another technology should not be entirely decided by folks only inside that workplace, even if they are organized into workers councils. Rather, such decisions also affect the workplace's consumers and its neighbors and those consumers and neighbors should therefore have a say as well.

To incorporate all actors proportionately in decision-making requires demands that increase the power of those who are under-represented. For example, demands for neighborhood oversight committees regarding the ecological and other local impacts of a workplace are desirable, as are demands for consumer movements to have a say over workplace decisions about products and prices. These demands can lead to gains that benefit those in need and can also expand consciousness, strengthen commitment, and develop new organization for winning still more in the future.

5. We can democratize social budgets

Think of a city deciding on its budget for education, sanitation, new housing, a new

health clinic, snow removal, or whatever else. Who is affected? All citizens, of course. Who makes the decision? Elite elected officials pressured by local and national corporations trying to maximize profit, of course.

To move toward more participation, progressive demands over the size or purpose of particular budget items such as national military expenditures, state welfare programs, or local county payments toward a new hospital are certainly good. But demands that make budgets public and that incorporate workers and consumers councils into budget decisions are excellent, too.

Indeed, as with every component of participatory economic program, the overarching idea is simple. Demands that make conditions better for oppressed constituencies are of course good. Then, if the rhetoric and process of campaigns to win such demands also increases participatory economic solidarity, understanding, and organization, that's an important improvement. And finally, if the campaigns can win not only better conditions, but a new playing field on which it is easier to win still more gains, that's ideal.

6. We can institute self management in our own projects and movements

Imagine we have a movement that argues forcefully and uncompromisingly that actors should impact economic decisions throughout the whole economy in proportion as they are affected by those decisions. Now imagine that in its own operations this same movement elevates a fund raiser, a big donor, or someone with a lot of training to a position of power over a large staff or even over a vast rank and file, removing most participants from proportionate influence or even from any influence at all over the movement's agenda.

This is not a pretty picture. This movement wouldn't learn from and become educated by its own self-managing experience, because it wouldn't have a self-managing experience. It wouldn't serve as a model legitimating the efficacy of its demands, because it would function instead like the institutions it opposed. It wouldn't have a new practice embodying what it preaches, but would instead have an old-fashioned practice undermining its credibility to those it addressed. It wouldn't be congenial and empowering for all its members nor welcome their fullest talents and participation, but would instead breed internal strife and bad morale.

For these reasons, a very critical programmatic component of a participatory economic movement should be structuring itself to incorporate steadily more self management in its own operations. Movement projects headed by a few but staffed by many that do nothing to democratize themselves are poor vehicles for seeking self management in the broader society they inhabit.

Dignified Work

The issue of Dignified Work has two primary components:

What is a just division of tasks for each person; and

What division of tasks do we need to adopt in order to have our work foster self-management?

Just Work

A just division of tasks requires that each person should have a fair share of good and bad quality of life attributes in their workday or, if they don't, that they be remunerated accordingly. That is, why should one person have nice work conditions and another person horrible ones, unless the latter person is given extra pay to offset this burden?

But conveniently this element of Just Work is already accomplished in our unfolding vision because remunerating according to effort and sacrifice, as per our earlier commentaries, automatically offsets any disparity in quality of life attributes. That is, if we remunerate according to effort and sacrifice, whenever Betty works at a less fulfilling and more demanding job than Salim, Betty will also exert more effort and sacrifice at work and will therefore get higher pay. So we already have Just Work due to our prior agreements about Just Rewards. But is that all there is to Dignified Work?

Equally Empowering Work

We also want our economic actors to influence outcomes in proportion as they are affected by them, in accord with self management. Suppose Betty spends all day cleaning floors and Salim spends all day doing empowering financial and social tasks that increase his decision-making related skills and knowledge. Even if Betty and Salim have the same workplace voting rights and even if they are remunerated justly, after months of working at these differently empowering jobs, Betty will have neither the energy, knowledge, confidence, nor skills to play a role comparable to Salim's in influencing decisions.

Workplace council meetings involve discussions, presentations, debates, and votes. If Salim comes to meetings with extensive knowledge, social skills, confidence, and energy due to his empowering job and Betty comes to the same meetings with obliterated knowledge, social skills, confidence, and energy due to her dis-empowering job – Salim is going to have way more impact at the meetings than Betty. In fact, the relatively few workers with highly empowering jobs will by virtue of their on-the-job situations dominate discussions. Even a fair vote will regularly select among proposals that the empowered few offer and settle on proposals that they favor. Betty will at best ratify the will of the empowered, informed, energetic few. At worst she and everyone else who has a dis-empowering job will be completely excluded.

It follows that attaining Self-Management requires not only the formal right to participate in decisions, but also that everyone enjoys conditions that prepare and promote their effective participation. If an economy is class divided so that those with empowering jobs make decisions others obey and those with disempowering jobs merely obey decisions others make, there will no be self management, clearly. This is why we highlight

Dignified Work as a theme unto itself. If workers are to participate equally in economic decision-making, their diverse jobs must affect their decision-making inclinations and competence comparably. The old slogan that you are what you eat may or may not be economically meaningful. But the new slogan that you become what you do, is surely economically pivotal.

Balanced Job Complexes

Our third thematic goal (after Just Rewards and Self-Management) is therefore about what we call Dignified Work and Balanced Job Complexes.

In any economy, each job combines many tasks which, taken in combination, have an overall “empowerment index.” This index is higher if the sum total of tasks in the job are more empowering, and lower if they are less empowering. Jobs in typical corporations combine quite similar tasks into such jobs as secretary, mail boy, janitor, CEO, finance officer, assembly line operator, manager, and so on. Most people in these corporations do jobs that have a low empowerment index. A very few do jobs that have a very high index.

To attain Balanced Job Complexes, we instead advocate apportioning tasks to jobs so that each job in the economy has an average overall index. In other words, we allot to each job not a homogenous batch of tasks at only one empowerment level, but a combination of tasks with varied empowerment qualities whose total empowerment effect is the average for society. Instead of Judy being a secretary, John being a Comptroller, and Jerry cleaning bathrooms, Judy, John, and Jerry all have a variety of tasks in their designated job with various levels of rote and empowering implications. The overall empowerment effect on Judy of her combination of tasks and on John of his and on Jerry of his, are, as best we can manage it, the same.

In other words, with balanced job complexes we of course each have a job in which we enjoy our own particular and perhaps even unique conditions of work. However, despite differences in specific content from what others do, our job and all other jobs are comparably empowering.

As a result of balancing job complexes there is no longer a fixed management with uniquely informative and uplifting tasks. There is no longer a set of rote jobs whose conditions are only deadening. Indeed, there is no hierarchy of jobs vis-à-vis empowerment effects. We define all this away by combining tasks into jobs in this new way, balancing tasks for empowerment effects. Thus, each person working in the economy does a combination of tasks sensibly accommodated to the needs of particular work situations, of course, but also designed to balance empowerment impacts rather than to monopolize the most empowering circumstances for a few folks at the top of a workplace hierarchy of power.

Okay, it is clear that by its very definition balancing job complexes accomplishes both being fair and also laying a proper foundation for self-management. It avoids dividing the workforce into a highly-empowered “coordinator class” and a subordinate, disenfranchised working class, instead giving all workers comparable empowerment in

their economic lives. But are there offsetting problems with the approach? For example, can it get the work done, and can it get it done well?

Individual Options

Folks at largely rote jobs will generally like the idea of balanced job complexes, because their lives would improve as they get their share of empowering tasks of one sort or another. They will see the switch from unbalanced to balanced jobs as justly redressing a demeaning and unfair situation they have long suffered.

On the other hand, folks who occupy or aspire to cushier and more empowered jobs such as managers, doctors, lawyers, empowered intellectuals, etc., will often see this proposal as threatening because after job complexes are balanced, their old jobs would no longer exist in the same form. A person in an economy with balanced job complexes may of course do some managing (of a sort), doctoring, lawyering, conducting, researching, designing, composing, etc., but this person would also have to do a fair share of less empowering tasks to attain an overall balance like everyone else's. Thus, people's jobs who are now in relatively commanding positions will lose some empowering tasks and incorporate their share of less empowering, rote, or even deadening labor.

In any event, whoever enunciates it, opposition to job balancing most often employs one of two rationales:

Balancing would impinge my freedom to do what I want which would be immoral.
Balancing would consign even the most talented to rote tasks and thereby reduce the social product to everyone's disadvantage.
Let's consider each complaint in turn, to close out our case on behalf of Dignified Work.

Freedom

It is true that allowing only balanced job complexes would by definition preclude anyone having an unbalanced job complex and would thus also preclude complainant 1 above from doing only empowering tasks as her job. However, this is true in the same sense that reshaping an economy to have no slave-holding options precludes anyone from owning slaves. That is, owning a slave means the slave-owner freely expresses his slave-owning aspiration, but it also means that someone else is owned. If we rule out that anyone should be owned, we simultaneously rule out that slave-owning aspirations should be honored. Similarly, having a job complex that is more empowering than average is only possible at the expense of someone else having a job complex that is less empowering than average. If we rule out that anyone should be saddled with a less than an average complex, yes, we must also rule out that anyone can have a more than average complex.

But freedom to act on one's aspirations is a valid and wonderful thing only so long as it is contingent on everyone else having the same freedom. Some aspirations – owning slaves, killing a neighbor, employing wage slaves, having an unbalanced job complex – intrinsically impinge on others' rights to similar advantages. In other words, it is no more

immoral to impose job balancing on society to eliminate a class hierarchy of those who order and those who obey, than it is to impose abolition of slavery on society in order to eliminate a class hierarchy of those who own others and those who are owned by others. All people's rights to never be a slave trump Mr. Plantation's right to own slaves. Similarly, all people's rights to enjoy conditions prerequisite to self-management trump Ms. Manager's right to monopolize empowering job circumstances.

Productivity

But how about output? Seeking to avoid a class division between order givers and order takers, are we also reducing society's overall productivity by under-utilizing some folks capacities? If so, is the loss in output so great that it makes balancing job complexes unwise?

I should first clarify that even if job balancing would in fact sacrifice some output, it wouldn't cause me to renounce Dignified Work as a goal since I see self-management and classlessness as far more worthy aspirations than attaining maximum output. In fact, however, it turns out that we can make our cake with dignity and still eat plenty of it too.

First, normal human beings generally don't work endless hours at empowering and also more productive tasks. Rather, folks with a relative monopoly on empowering tasks often do them some limited amount of time each week, spending a lot of other time chatting, loafing, meeting, bossing other people around, or playing golf. Realignment of their responsibilities so they are balanced can often be done without much incursion on their most productive capabilities. We instead replace their excessive time off or their bossing by more rote responsibilities.

But second, suppose that I am wrong. Suppose that every hour that someone now doing highly empowering tasks is asked to do more rote tasks is an hour subtracted from time going to their most talented focuses. As complainant 2 fears, that would certainly entail a loss in output from that person. For example, if a surgeon who now works all day long on surgery (no desk work, no loafing, no golf, etc.) suddenly has to do her share of less empowering work such as cleaning bed pans, then to make room she must of course do less surgery, and she will in total therefore generate less valuable output.

But what about the other side of the coin? What about the nurse who in this new context is better trained and able to more fully use her talents? Indeed, how about all the people previously "dumbed-down" by schooling and then by on-the-job boredom and who have been previously constrained to do only rote tasks but now have Dignified Work to do? What about the creativity, talent, and skills that would be newly-tapped for society due to about 70% to 80% of the population now being prepared to fulfill their capabilities rather than channeled as before into rote obedience and subservience? Does anyone really believe that the sum total of creative talents and energies available for production would be reduced by opting for an economic arrangement that enjoins every actor to become as able and productive as they can and that provides the means for them to do it, but that then also requires each to do a fair share of non-empowering work as well as a fair share

of what their talents are best suited to?

If current class-divided societies were perfect meritocracies in the sense of welcoming every person to become as productive as possible, and then rewarding with better work conditions and more empowering circumstances only those who produce more so that any effort to balance circumstances among workers would reduce output, we should still overwhelmingly favor balanced job complexes. Our guiding value should not be the size of output of an economy – but instead equitably meeting needs and developing capacities while furthering values we aspire to such as self-management, solidarity, equity, and diversity. But of course, in reality societies with hierarchical distributions of tasks don't even remotely approach being perfect meritocracies. Instead, in such societies an educated and credentialed elite monopolizes empowering and knowledge-enhancing tasks partly due to their talents, but overwhelmingly due to their circumstantial advantages and their willingness to trample those below. Without job balancing, most members of an economy are propelled into relative subservience not by a lack of potential, but by socialization, schooling, and on-the-job circumstances. They could certainly partake in decision-making and creative work given the opportunity to enjoy a balanced job complex, and the gains would be enormous.

The second complainant also fails to notice the amount of time, energy, and talent that goes into maintaining the exploitative exclusion of most actors from empowering work and into coercing their obedience to instructions that they are alienated from. If we account for the difference between class-divided workplaces and dignified workplaces regarding time given to oversight and enforcement, time lost due to outright struggle and strife, and the new pools of talent salvaged by utilizing previously squelched potentials, not only does the switch to balanced job complexes emerge as preferable on moral grounds and on grounds of laying a basis for real self-management, but also on grounds of economic output.

Indeed, the only debit for balancing job complexes, at least viewed from the angle of those now enjoying a relative monopoly on empowering work, is that it removes their relative advantages. But that is precisely the purpose of job balancing, at least when viewed from below – and that's where our eyes ought to be seeing from.

A Program Seeking Dignified Work

We want to dignify work so we seek to equalize the empowerment effects of all jobs. But how?

Upgrading the Bottom

Much work is intentionally dumbed down precisely so that workers don't gain confidence and knowledge facilitating demands about conditions or wages. And the same holds for workers being systematically isolated from one another and denied interaction and sociality. All this degradation enhances control from above.

So one initial move toward dignified work is to improve the circumstances, conditions, and options of those in the most menial, disempowering jobs. We could demand improved conditions, a less stressful pace of work, better ventilation or other relevant improvements, plus allowances for on-going education to get better work, for example.

Each workplace and job has its own unique details, of course, but still, in a workplace with many rote and boring positions, workers might usefully seek the right to trade tasks for variety, to increase workplace interactivity for sociality, and to freely use inactive moments for creative engagement and learning rather than simply enduring boredom.

Lowering the Top

Moving toward balanced job complexes includes not only bettering the lot of the worst off, but also having those with a monopoly of desirable and empowering tasks take on some onerous responsibilities. Think of a law firm. There already exists the interesting concept of pro bono legal work. Firm members, that is, are supposed to donate a certain amount of their energies to the indigent as a social responsibility. Campaigns to dignify work can also benefit from having those with elite jobs do tasks they otherwise would not have opted for. Thus, we might demand that those who have enjoyable and empowering work must reallocate some of their time to tasks ordinarily lower in the hierarchy in their workplaces, thereby allowing those with less fortunate work assignments the time to pursue better options.

Lawyers would spend some time doing tasks for their secretaries or for those who clean the building, freeing the latter to enjoy on the job training, etc. Or nurses, orderlies, and custodians could demand time for further training, less stress, better conditions, and more social work arrangements and the doctors and administrators in their hospitals could have to make up at least part of the labor difference. Just thinking about it, don't you find yourself smiling?

Creating a New Middle

Seeking to have secretaries and custodians, nurses and orderlies, or folks doing rote labor on assembly lines or waiting tables in restaurants benefit from better conditions or get a little extra time for new training, and having those hierarchically above them in their workplaces doing some onerous tasks to make up for losses, of course would be very good. But an even better approach would literally change the tasks that people do. We could demand, for example, that owners give workers in lower positions more information processing tasks, more tasks that give confidence and develop decision-making skills, and more decision-making tasks per se, while reducing the amount of these same tasks in the jobs of those in higher administrative and policy-making positions.

Thus, nurses and custodians and assembly workers and cooks and waitresses and delivery drivers assess their workplaces and demand reallocation of tasks and responsibilities from the jobs of those hierarchically above them into their own job definitions, with some of

their onerous tasks in turn going upward. As a result, job requirements become more humane and empowering, and move toward being balanced.

Secretaries demand more diverse empowering responsibilities that give them more time in intellectual and decision-related functions. Waiters redefine waiting on tables to be more interactive and social and less servile. They demand new conditions and social relations involved, as well as more decision-making power in their restaurants.

I know all this probably sounds vague—but I think that that's proper at this stage of discussion. There are few if any general rules about such matters. The issue is for those employed in each firm to use their councils to reassess their work and raise demands to reallocate components of work more fairly than when they are allocated to dehumanize, atomize, and disempower most employees, and elevate only a few.

Emphasizing Power

The central issue in balancing jobs is ensuring that by virtue of their economic lives all employees are comparably prepared to participate in decision making and have comparable access to decision making involvement. Thus, the best and most critical alterations to seek on the road to dignified work are those impacting empowerment. Workers especially seek reforms that spread access to knowledge and information, that enlarge day-to-day social interactions, that enhance decision-making skills, and that win increased direct decision-making influence, of course.

Instead of only doctors being involved in discussions and decisions about hospital policy, this “task” is re-allocated among doctors, nurses, and orderlies. Instead of managers being a separate category alone in possession of relevant decision-making information and opportunities in factories, redefinitions distribute responsibilities and information among all workers, thereby reducing hierarchies of power.

Dignifying Our Own Work

For organizations and movements to effectively advocate balanced job complexes in society, they will have to address their own internal job complexes as well. For one thing, who is going to seek just work assignments at GM and then passively do only rote tasks in his or her union or other movement organization? And who outside such a movement will be impressed if it doesn't practice what it preaches? “You say you are for balanced job complexes. Then why don't you have them?”

Think about The Nation, Mother Jones, Greenpeace, The Institute for Policy Studies, NOW, the NAACP, labor unions, massive peace movements, local housing campaigns, the New Party, and whatever other progressive or left institutions or movements you wish to bring into focus. In each case you might ask whether they have balanced job complexes or whether they have typical corporate divisions of labor so that some folks monopolize fulfilling and empowering tasks while others have only rote and obedient ones. If, the latter situation pertains, do the folks doing onerous jobs get paid more? Will the

movement “owners”, “ceos,” and “managers” welcome demands from their workforces to balance movement circumstances for empowerment effects? Will they reallocate tasks in a steady progression toward balanced job complexes, including reducing their own elite prerogatives? Perhaps in some cases the answer will be yes, but not always. However, the central issue isn’t assuaging the worries of those now administering movement organizations. It is attaining a movement that practices what it economically preaches, a movement that benefits its members, improves its product, becomes congenial to working class constituencies, and makes credible its external demands, all by attaining balanced job complexes in its own organizations.

Just as Blacks and Latinos and women in movement projects, organizations, and campaigns have had a responsibility to push, cajole, and struggle the movement forward on matters of internal race and gender relations over the past few decades, so too do those who now occupy the rote and lowly positions of our movement organizations have a responsibility to push, cajole, and struggle the movement forward on matters of internal class definition. The strategic focuses and demands noted throughout this commentary for society, apply as well to our own institutions, though we can hope that the struggle inside our institutions will be quicker, completed soon, and able to provide a solid foundation for larger subsequent struggles outside our institutions.

Participatory Allocation

An economy needs some procedure for coordinating different workers’ activities with one another and with the desires of consumers. The procedure, called economic allocation, determines how much of each input and output is used or produced, and where it winds up.

The overwhelming consensus is that markets are a worthy economic allocation institution. Some dissidents still support central planning instead. In our view, however, both markets and central planning are abysmal and we need participatory planning as an alternative. Beyond what a short commentary can argue, I hope folks will pursue the evidence and more substantial argument available at www.parecon.org.

Markets, No

Markets involve buyers and sellers coming together with each trying to maximize his or her own benefit. In any transaction the buyer and seller compete to buy cheap and sell dear. For one to get more, the other must get less. Those affected by the transaction but not directly involved as buyer or seller have no say in it. Pollution or other effects on non-buyer/sellers go unaccounted and can’t influence the transaction. Even with markets working optimally, actors become individualist. Their motives and preference development are skewed toward me firstism. No wonder “nice guys finish last.” Exchange rates ignore social and external effects and therefore diverge from true social costs. And a class division emerges between those few who monopolize decision-making skills, opportunities, and information, and a much larger group disempowered and disenfranchised from decision making. The former we call coordinators. They rule the

economy. The latter are the workers. They follow orders.

In these ways and others markets cause people to trample one another's well being, homogenize tastes within classes, reduce all activity to the cash nexus, remunerate power or output to the point of grotesque income and wealth differentials, and allot disproportionate power to a class that monopolizes decision making access at the expense of the majority who only follow orders.

Central Planning, No

Central planning is conceptually simpler than market allocation. Planners accumulate information by diverse means and then decide exchange rates, amounts to produce, and incomes. Workers and consumers abide the planners' decisions. The only wrinkle is that the planners have to issue orders and get some feedback on their possibility...orders go down, feedback come back up, orders go down, obedience comes back up. The feedback comes from "agents" of the planners in each workplace, the managers.

On the plus side, Central planning can conceivably overcome the intrinsic inability of markets to account for the social and public implications of transactions and can also conceivably reduce the individualizing effects of market competition and even take into account effects on workers. But as main debits central planning inevitably produces coordinator class rule with planners allying with their managerial agents in each workplace to in turn control rote workers, and central planning also adds an increased generalized authoritarianism and subordination to economics, thereby strongly violating self management. More, the class dynamics and increased authoritarianism of central planning tend over time to swamp the technical potential it has to pay better attention to generalized social and personal development, instead biasing toward the enhancement of power, status, and conditions of elite planners and managers and other educated coordinator class members.

Markets and central planning therefore not only don't promote just rewards, self-management, and dignified work, they severely impede their achievement, even as they also undermine solidarity, diversity, and other civilized social norms.

Participatory Planning, Yes

So what's our alternative? Well, why can't workers in different enterprises and industries, and consumers in different neighborhoods and regions, coordinate their joint endeavors themselves – consciously, democratically, equitably, and efficiently? Why can't councils of consumers and workers propose what they would like to do, and revise their own proposals as they discover more about the impact of their desires on others? What is impossible about a social, multi-step, planning procedure in which other workers approve production proposals only when in light of full qualitative information and accurate valuations they are convinced the proposals are socially efficient, and in which other consumers approve consumption requests only when in light of full information they are convinced the requests are not socially abusive? What is impossible, in other words,

about the associated producers and consumers together planning their related activities without the debilitating effects of markets or central planning?

We already have argued for workers and consumers councils and federations of councils, for remuneration according to effort and sacrifice, for balanced job complexes, and for each actor influencing decisions in proportion as they are affected by them. The participants in the participatory planning procedures are individual workers and consumers, the workers' and consumers' councils and federations of them, and also various groups of people a part of whose balanced job complex is to do data handling to assist allocation in what we call Iteration Facilitation Boards (IFBs).

Conceptually, the participatory planning procedure is pretty simple, but quite different than anything we are accustomed to. Workers and consumers negotiate outcomes based on full knowledge of effects and having proportionate influence in decisions. In a nutshell, the facilitation board announces what we call "indicative prices" for all goods, resources, categories of labor, and capital stocks. These are calculated based on the prior year's experience. Consumers and consumer councils and federations respond with consumption proposals taking the indicative prices as estimates of a true valuation of all the resources, equipment, labor, bad byproducts, and social benefits associated with each good or service. Workers and workers councils and council federations respond with production proposals, listing the outputs they would make available and the inputs they would need to produce them, taking the indicative prices as estimates of the full social benefits of outputs and true opportunity costs of inputs. Receiving the public proposals from workers and consumers and their councils, the facilitation boards calculate the excess demand or supply for each good and mechanically adjust the indicative price for the good up or down in light of the new data. Then, using the new indicative prices plus their access to full qualitative information, consumer and worker councils and federations revise and resubmit their proposals.

Essentially the procedure "whittles" overly optimistic, infeasible proposals down to a feasible plan in two different ways: Consumers individually requesting more than their effort ratings (income) warrant or collectively wanting more of some good than workers propose to produce are pressured by new indicative prices and the desire to attain a viable final plan to reduce or to shift their requests to less socially costly items that can garner the approval of other consumer councils who regard their prior requests as greedy or of workers reluctant to supply the outputs sought. Workers councils whose proposals have lower than average social benefit given the resources at their disposal or who are proposing less than consumers desire of their product, are pressured to increase either their efforts or their efficiency (or their number of employees) to win the approval of other workers and meet consumer desires. As iterations of the planning process proceed, proposals move closer to mutual feasibility and indicative prices converge toward true social opportunity costs. Since no participant in the planning procedure enjoys an advantage in influence over any other, and since each participant impacts the valuation of social costs and benefits like all others, but with each having more impact on what they are involved in and less on what they aren't affected by, the procedure generates equity, efficiency, and self management simultaneously.

In other words, individuals make proposals for their own private goods consumption. Neighborhood councils make proposals that include approved requests for private goods as well as shared requests for the neighborhood's collective consumption. Higher-level federations make proposals that include approved requests from member councils as well as the federation's collective consumption request. Similarly, each production unit proposes a production plan. Workplaces enumerate the inputs they want and outputs they propose to make available. Regional and industry federations aggregate proposals and keep track of excess supply and demand. Having proposed its own plan, every "actor" (individual or collective) receives information regarding other actors' proposals and the response of other actors to its proposal. Each actor (individual or collective), then makes a new proposal. As every actor "bargains" through successive "iterations," the process converges to a viable plan. Along the way the "actors" utilize various information including "indicative prices," their own agreed measures of labor effort and sacrifice, and detailed qualitative information from one another available on request. The attained plan manifests actors' preferences proportionately as they are impacted. More, each actor benefits only insofar as do all others. That is, my income depends directly on the socially average income and my job comfort depends on the quality of the socially average job complex. Even my benefit from any investment I propose for my workplace depends on how that investment raises social averages for jobs or for income or expands the total social product that we all share in – and so does yours. Solidarity is therefore enhanced by participatory planning because our interests are entwined and our daily economic calculations occur in light of one another's situations. Diversity is welcome to participatory for the benefits that accrue from many options and checks and balances. Equity is guaranteed by the remunerative norm. And self-management is intrinsic to the allocation system's foundational logic and its operation, fostered by its every feature.

Prices are "indicative" during the planning process in the sense of indicating the best current estimates of final valuations. Prices are not binding at each stage, but are instead flexible in that they may change in a future round of planning, but also in that qualitative information provides important additional guidance that can lead people to act contrary to what quantitative prices indicate. More, the indicative prices up to and including the final rates of exchange, do not stem from competition or authoritarian determinations, but from social consultation and compromise. The appended qualitative information comes directly from concerned parties and enters the process to help keep the quantitative indicators as accurate as possible, as well as to develop workers' and consumers' sensitivity to fellow workers' and consumers' situations and everyone's understanding of the intricate tapestry of human relations that determines what we can and cannot consume or produce.

Obviously, the above just touches the surface of participatory planning...not providing a detailed picture of either the planning "iterations" or the background of motives, actions, and institutions that make them viable, nor elaborating on the day-to-day roles nor social implications. But if interested you can certainly access more comprehensive discussions online in the parecon section of ZNet – www.parecon.org.

In the next commentary in this series we will address short-term program for attaining participatory planning. For now, however, regarding a vision for how to conduct allocation...it comes down to this.

Do we want to let people have income in accord with capital ownership or power, or try and measure the value of each person's contribution to social production and allow individuals to withdraw consumption goods from social production accordingly? Or do we want to base any differences in consumption rights only on differences in personal sacrifices made in producing goods and services? In other words, do we want an economy that implements the maxim "to each according to the value of his or her property or power or personal contribution," or an economy that obeys the maxim "to each according to his or her effort?"

Do we want a few to conceive and coordinate the work of the many? Or do we want everyone to have the opportunity to participate in economic decision making to the degree they are affected by the outcome, and the training and circumstances to guarantee their capacity to do so? In other words, do we want to continue to organize work hierarchically, or do we want job complexes balanced for empowerment?

Do we want a structure for expressing preferences biased in favor of individual over social consumption? Or do we want to make it as easy to register preferences for social as for individual consumption? In other words, do we want markets or nested federations of consumer councils?

And do we want economic decisions to be determined by groups competing against one another for well-being and survival? Or do we want to plan our joint endeavors democratically, equitably, and efficiently, with all actors having the proper influence and each benefiting in parallel with the rest? In other words, do we want to abdicate economic decision making to the market, or do we want to embrace the possibility of participatory planning?

Vision Matters

So far I have sent out an economic vision and strategy commentary each of the past eight Sundays. I assumed we would quickly agree that we don't have but that we do very much need a shared economic vision, and that to get one we need to collectively debate visionary ideas, junk what we don't like, come up with any new features we need, and finally settle on something we can collectively espouse. But since it seems that we don't in fact agree about the importance of this agenda, here I want to re-visit the claim that having shared vision and program is a prerequisite for an effective mass movement.

Imagine you are organizing folks for the upcoming Washington IMF/World Bank demonstrations. Or that you are giving a public talk about poverty, or that you are making a presentation in an economics class, or that you are hanging out in a bar chatting with workmates. Someone says, okay, I know you hate what people are paid in our society. You hate our society's jobs. You hate the way its decisions are made. And you hate its competition and profit seeking. So what do you like? What should people earn? How should we arrange jobs? How much power should people have? What kind of workplace or budgetary decision-making should we have? How should goods and services be

allocated? What economy do you want instead of capitalism?

My experience is that folks skeptical about activism raise just these questions, yet few leftists can compellingly answer them. If there aren't any alternatives to present institutions, these skeptics rightly reason, then seeking systemic change is foolish. If we must have wages paid the way they are now, jobs organized the way they are now, decisions made the way they are now, and profits sought the way they are now, then even if we somehow change some other aspect of our economy, these basics are going to overwhelm any momentary gains, and everything will eventually wind up back where it was or worse. So why seek hopeless change?

We can logically rebut such cynicism by noting the important gains movements have won in our history: the end of slavery, women's suffrage, child labor laws, the end of Jim Crow racism, the forty hour workweek. But no matter how high we pile such historical evidence, our reports of past victories won't assuage everyone's doubts about contemporary prospects. To become motivated, most people need to see how economic life could be more fulfilling and how their actions could contribute to such ends. To become motivated, doubtful people need to encounter credible, positive, inspiring aims, over and over, coming from many activists in many venues, all more or less synchronizing what they say for mutual reinforcement. In other words, to become active typical citizens need to repeatedly encounter inspiring organizers with shared vision and strategy.

And it isn't only that activists lacking shared vision won't inspire and sustain motivation. Sensibly choosing tactics and usefully stringing together campaigns to reach sought goals also requires shared vision. Vision provides hope and motivates effort, yes, but it also organizes our criticisms and orients our struggles. Vision motivates participation and it informs strategy. Strategy in turn prevents reactive and dysfunctional politics. Yet amazingly, even though there is lack of motivation, reactive organizing, and dysfunctional politics all around us, there is not only little agreement in our movements about either vision or strategy, there is also little effort to rectify the confusion.

For example, ZMI is a school that Z holds each summer. Some folks arrive very new to left thought and activity, of course, but many others arrive with an amazing wealth of practical experience. Nonetheless, even in its congenial atmosphere and with its highly motivated constituency, very few who come to ZMI can confidently present an economic (or kinship or cultural or political) vision and strategy. And the same holds true of organizers I meet when I go out to speak with local community groups or on campuses. Many have well formulated understandings of the oppressive dynamics of current institutions, to be sure, but few are clear about what they want in place of current institutions and about how to attain it.

Is all this a problem? Is it part of why our movements are weak? Is attaining shared vision and strategy at least as important as enumerating for the fourteen thousandth time that corporations are authoritarian, that poverty hurts, and that profit shouldn't go before people? Or are clear and compelling vision and strategy irrelevant, so that we only need to describe more perfectly how current injustices operate and what our immediate targets

should be, and then watch the barricades go up?

Parecon itself may or may not be a compelling economic vision, and likewise for the strategic insights I have offered over these past few weeks. But what seems absolutely certain is that if parecon isn't worthy then we need to figure out something else that is. And whether we start with parecon or with something different and better, we need to collectively refine, enhance, and learn how to argue for a vision, as well as how to extrapolate strategy from it.

In short, to succeed our movement needs economic vision and related long and short-term program. For that matter, it also needs kinship, cultural, and political vision and program. Of course, not everyone has to be working on developing all this vision and program every minute of every day. But don't quite a few of us have to put some serious energy into that creative task? And at the very least, once visions are enunciated and refined, don't we all have to understand them and make them our own and become good at explaining what we want and how we are going to collectively go about getting it?

A Program Seeking Participatory Allocation

Participatory planning is the allocation component of participatory economics. Producers and consumers organized in councils cooperatively negotiate labor, resource, and output allocations. The procedure organizes economic choices and simultaneously fosters participatory self-management. That's the vision, but visions result from long years of organizing, educating, and fighting for short-range demands that embody the vision's basic principles and bring us incrementally closer to their realization.

So what short-run demands can foster participatory planning? Eight broad areas of change stand out for me.

Council Infrastructure and Knowledge Base

Participatory planning stands on two primary pillars: democratic participatory councils and wide dispersal of all information relevant to economic decision-making. Thus, to establish or strengthen workplace or consumer councils or to enlarge access to information supports participatory planning. For example, efforts to win workers' rights to meet and/or convene their own on-the-job rank-and-file organizations are very positive. And likewise efforts to "open the books" in a firm or in government economic institutions are also part and parcel of developing norms and consciousness supporting participatory planning.

Market Prices

One reason to favor participatory planning is that it gets prices right. Rather than over-valuing goods with negative public effects or under-valuing those with positive public effects, parecon properly accounts for impacts "external to the buyer and seller" including

specifically accounting for the full social impact on workers and the environment. So to intervene in markets to move prices toward true valuations promotes participatory planning. For example, demands to tax goods with bad environmental or human by-products (such as liquor, cigarettes, or cars), or to subsidize goods with desirable impact external to the “buyer and seller,” such as health care, socially valuable skills training, parks, low-income housing, and education, are all “pareconish.” In other words, parecon consumer or other movements should critique not only prices inflated by monopoly power, but even prices that are reasonable in market terms but unreasonable in social and human terms.

Qualitative Descriptive Information

One of the methods parecon employs to ensure that its indicative prices reflect true social costs and benefits as well as guard against alienated behavior and mechanistic ignorance of the human dimensions of economics, is to incorporate into planning not only quantitative indicators, but also qualitative information about what goes into producing goods and what their consumption means to people. It follows that demands about honest and comprehensive labeling and advertising, particularly to include information bearing on the conditions of workers or impact on broader social relations, can also be foster the values and mindsets of parecon, contributing to preparing for its full implementation. Imagine honest labeling and advertising – truly honest...

Sharing and Solidarity

One of the ills of market exchange is that it presses all actors toward individualist rather than collective consumption, even when this is harmful not only socially, but to the direct participant. Parecon, in contrast, is as able to offer collective as private solutions. For example, are private autos better than decent public transit for inner city travel? On a smaller scale, does it make sense for everyone in an apartment complex to be almost totally isolated from everyone else, getting no benefits from sharing collective goods? Does it make sense to pay for the tremendous redundancy of everyone having their own instance of every imaginable commodity?

Workers’ councils aren’t the only place where citizens can usefully conceive and fight for worthy demands. Not only can consumer movements fight about prices and provision of qualitative information, as indicated above, and about government budgets and related matters, as indicated below, they can also locally conceive how their members might benefit from pooling their resources and sharing purchases collectively. The only struggle in this instance is with old mindsets, but the resulting increase in social interaction, fulfillment, and solidarity, is certainly part of building a pareconish mentality.

Human Needs not Profitability

In parecon, unlike capitalism, collective consumption and investment are handled within the general planning process that gives each person proportionate input. This leads to collective consumption and investment interactively oriented toward the well-being and

development of all actors. Thus, demands which seek to put people above profit in government economic choices are pareconish, whether we are talking about reducing war spending and curtailing sops to corporate power, or expanding social spending on housing, health, welfare, education, social infrastructure, or art.

Democratize Budgets

One way to affect government budgets is to agitate on behalf of better choices, as suggested above. Another way is to alter the processes by which town, city, county, state, or national budgets are proposed and then decided on. Demands that increase public involvement and empowerment, particularly via fledgling council structures that could grow into parecon institutions, can improve our lot in the present and also lay the groundwork for a preferred future. The demand isn't for input into an unimportant subset of the budget, of course, but into how options are proposed throughout the budget, and of course into making decisions about all proposed options, as well.

More Leisure, Less Labor

Markets intrinsically pressure actors to work longer hours and enjoy less leisure. Competition does this nasty job, generating strong incentives to overwork and ensuring that if a few do raise their labor hours, all others in related endeavors must do so as well, lest they suffer irreparable losses. Think of current high-powered law firms to see that this occurs even against the desires of powerful people. The lawyers are pushed into trying to endlessly raise their billable hours, taking on as many new clients as can be had, even beyond their own manic personalities and greed. If they relent, some other firm may become more powerful, gobbling up market share, and the non manic firm runs the risk not merely of having more leisure at the cost of less income (which many and maybe all its members would prefer), but of losing their firm entirely. Thus we see an upward spiral in work hours per week and a decline in vacation time. And this occurs despite increasing productivity that could sustain high output without excessive labor allotments. Comparing 1960 to 2000, we could have the same per capita output now, but work literally half as much, say a four hour workday or two weeks off every month, or a year on and then a year off, alternately over our lifetimes, for example.

Parecons generate no such pressure to expand work hours regardless of growing productivity. The choice of upping output without limit (not to mention with most people not sharing in it) or having a life, is not biased to the former by competitive survival needs. Thus, demands over workday length, length of the work week, vacation time, and time more generally are not only good ways to redistribute wealth, they are also means to get at this leisure destroying feature of our economy, and to propel pareconish calculations and aspirations.

Participatory Allocation in Our Movements

As with every other dimension of economic or other focuses of movement struggle, it is necessary to incorporate in our own efforts the aims and structures we propose for the

broader society outside. What can that mean in this case?

There is no allocation in each movement project and organization other than what we have mentioned in earlier commentaries regarding remuneration or allocation of tasks. But what about between our projects and organizations? What determines how many resources go to left print versus radio versus video, or to particular efforts in any of these left media? What determines how many resources are at the disposal of struggles around police violence and matters of race, or reproductive rights and matters of gender, or international relations and matters of war and peace, or domestic or global economics and matters of class? And what about allocations for local as compared to regional or national projects?

In the broad progressive or left community there is often no self conscious “allocation planning” of any sort at all, much less participatory planning. Allocation issues most often aren’t even openly raised, much less democratically decided. In fact, a key determinant of current left allocation is competitive fund raising and related essentially market and power defined dynamics. But just as having a parecon movement implies that within each institution we should seek balanced job complexes, just rewards in accord with effort and sacrifice, and participatory self management, shouldn’t it also mean that we attempt to imbue in the left project as a whole with elements of mutual aid and sharing and social planning?

As with other internal innovations, incorporating participatory allocation features in our movements won’t be easy, nor accomplished overnight. After all, at the moment progressive and left operations, projects, organizations, and “businesses” are barely more entwined and socially planned than are their corporate counterpart institutions in the mainstream. At a minimum, then, without prejudging precisely what can and ought to be done, it seems quite fair to at least suggest that there is considerable room for innovation and improvement regarding movement “planning” and mutual benefit.

Economics and the Rest of Society

A Participatory Economy produces, consumes, and allocates to meet people’s needs and develop their capacities. It also promotes equity, solidarity, diversity, and self-management. Its central features are workers’ and consumers’ councils, remuneration according to effort and sacrifice, balanced job complexes, and participatory planning. Yet, however high we may rate a parecon, a good society needs more than just a good economy.

Imagine a society with a participatory economy but sexist kinship institutions that subordinate women to men. What happens?

Parecon structures would violate a sexist household hierarchy by not subordinating women to men and by giving women and men expectations contrary to male supremacy. Sexist kinship arrangements would violate balanced job complexes by apportioning tasks unfairly in the home and by giving women and men expectations contrary to universal

equity. The parecon would produce equitable expectations that the kinship sphere would violate. The kinship sphere would impart expectations of female subordination that the economy would violate. But if an economy produces people to not fit their households and households socialize people to not fit their economy, the economy or households must change.

In light of this, suppose a feminist movement favors genderless parenting instead of mothering and fathering. Or maybe it rejects patriarchal marriage and the nuclear family. Whatever its preferences, a new feminist vision would certainly require that a compatible economy not violate kinship values. Likewise, a compatible kinship vision would have to respect parecon's economic requirements.

Once we understand this reciprocity, we see that building a participatory economy impacts building a feminist kinship sphere and vice versa, and therefore need to be compatible. And similarly, for a good economy to fit with desired innovations in education, or the state, or culture, or international relations, it must incorporate structures that respect the new aims of those other realms – and vice versa. This is the logic of “economics and the rest of society” and here are some indicative examples.

Education

Education wants to convey information and skills suited to each individual meeting their own agendas. “Be the best you desire to be.” But education also wants to convey information and skills suited to people filling available roles in the society. “Be what society needs you to be.”

For ideal educational institutions, we would want these two aims to be mutually consistent and supportive. Education for people to be what they desire should be precisely what’s needed to also prepare them for positions that society will willingly remunerate. Education that prepares people to fit a good society’s roles, should imply addressing people’s fulfillment and development. A good society, in other words, offers people diverse role options in tune with their true desires and inclinations.

But think about capitalism. It often needs compliance, passivity, and a willingness to obey orders and endure boredom. Thus capitalism violates education for human fulfillment and development, and capitalist schools dumb most people down.

Parecon, in contrast, needs schools to educate people to deal well with information, to make smart decisions, and to utilize their special talents and capacities as they prefer and are able. Parecon not only doesn’t conflict with good educational priorities, it fosters them.

Ecology

The relationship between parecon and the environment is a little trickier. Any economy says to any effort to address the ecology, “fine, but do it in a way consistent with business

as usual.” A market system thus says to those concerned about ecology, “fine, worry about the ecology, but don’t distort ecologically unsound market prices or curtail ecologically unconcerned market transactions or otherwise disrupt ecologically dismissive market logic.”

In contrast, participatory planning intrinsically properly values resources and ecological diversity in terms of their impact on human well-being and development. But beyond this, some people might also value various species or even natural formations independent of implications for humans. A parecon can accommodate rules about impact on other species, but only if it is compelled by outside constraints.

By its intrinsic logic, that is, a parecon values economic choices in terms of their implications for humans. It automatically accounts for resource depletion or pollution or extinctions or other ecological outcomes insofar as these in turn impact human well-being and development. Additionally, in response to an external advisory, a parecon can also not displace or kill rhinos, snail darters, smallpox bacteria, or anything else, even if displacing or killing rhinos, snail darters, smallpox bacteria, or anything else would benefit humans. In other words, when society deems an ecological constraint on economic options desirable, its imposition on a participatory economy will not disrupt the economy’s logic or efficiency.

But what about influences in the opposite direction? How does a parecon impact ecological concerns and sensibilities?

First, a parecon communicates to people focusing on ecology a strong impetus to not ignore the human dimension. Indeed, it literally compels all actors, including those who are primarily motivated by ecological priorities, to account for the human implications of their economic choices. And second, a parecon requires that ecological goals be realized without compromising balanced job complexes, remuneration according to effort and sacrifice, council self-management, and participatory planning.

The State

One implication of parecon for the state is that political functions will be enacted in balanced job complexes and be remunerated only for effort and sacrifice. For any vision of adjudication, legislation, and political implementation, this means that whatever political values we seek, they must not violate pareconish economic values. Thus we won’t have politics elevating some people to disproportionate power, rewarding some with unbalanced job complexes, or giving some unjust income. Nor will the ideological or behavioral implications of political institutions obstruct producing and consuming in a pareconish way.

The legal system of a society is one typical political component we might consider. Currently U.S. attorneys for opposed parties do whatever they can get away with to win. Neither is primarily seeking truth or justice, yet truth and justice are supposed to emerge from their competition. This may remind us of the even more ridiculous but quite similar

idea that economic buyers and sellers being greedy anti-social individualists will maximally promote just economic outcomes. In any event, I suspect that a serious political vision won't dispense with adjudication or policing but will, instead, define these functions more sensibly and find ways to accomplish them that also meets broader political, economic, and other priorities. Do we get rid of police or court trials and have everyone in the society do whatever policing is called for and resolve their disputes only informally or locally? I doubt it. I suspect we will instead recognize that like for piloting planes, or doing medical operations, or handling a big crane at construction sites, some folks being specially trained in police and courtroom functions with other folks not having to prepare for or worry about these particular tasks, will yield better skills and better utilize them than having everyone do these tasks without specialization, not to mention enhancing diversity. But however we come to understand police and courtroom or other political responsibilities, we will require balanced job complexes and participatory self-management for those doing them, of course.

International Relations

If we aspire to a parecon nationally, the consistent international economic goal seems pretty obvious. Why should a child born in a country with fewer resources or with a history of being dominated by colonialism have a worse life than a child born in a resource-rich country or a country that has colonially exploited others for decades? People born in different parts of the world should not suffer (or benefit) due to accidents of geography or past history. Thus a particular society with a parecon should deal with other nations in ways that reduce unjust differences in average income and circumstance as rapidly as possible without disrupting lives so much as to do more harm than good. A minimal but important step is that in trading with other countries a participatory economy would favor whichever price – the international market price or the parecon valuation within the parecon society – that most benefited the worse-off trade partner. Beyond this, it could offer various forms of aid, etc.

The Bottom Line

Obviously the above discussion is limited. Yet, nonetheless, many readers will easily agree that a good society should have equity of circumstance and income between men and women, respect for diversity of sexual and social choices, freedom for cultural communities to exist without fear of penalty and a general social respect for diversity, full political participation and full dissemination of information and skills essential to universal participatory self-management, respect for the natural environment as it affects humanity and also in its own right, and a steady equalization of wealth and circumstances internationally. But I suspect many readers would also easily agree that to answer the question "what do you want" and inform our strategic choices, we need more detailed and convincing descriptions of positive cultural, kinship, political, ecological, and international values and institutions.

The limited point of this commentary, therefore, is that if these new visions are to be compatible with parecon, they must not abrogate and ideally will even help promote

parecon's economic priorities and norms. Likewise, if parecon is to be compatible with these needed new visions, parecon's economic implications must not abrogate and ideally will even help promote their kinship, sexual, cultural, political, ecological, and international priorities and norms.

Participatory Economic Program

Participatory economics is a set of institutions for accomplishing production, consumption, and allocation while meeting people's needs and furthering their development; is a set of institutions designed to propel equity, solidarity, diversity, and self-management; is a set of institutions centered upon democratic councils, remuneration according to effort and sacrifice, balanced job complexes, and participatory planning; is a set of institutions that answers the question: if not capitalism, what do you want?

Participatory economic program is a set of demands meant to win improvements in people's lives in the short run while laying the basis for more gains and the eventual winning of a participatory economy in the long run. It includes demands for...

...just rewards – including profit, wealth, inheritance, luxury, and income taxes, affirmative action, full employment, minimum wage supports, social wage supports, reverse income taxes, higher wages, and also just rewards inside our movements.

...self-management – including workers' and consumers' councils, democratized information access, democratized workplace decision-making, consumer power over production norms, democratized budgets, and also self-management inside our own movements.

...dignified work – including upgrading degrading jobs, regulating overly empowering jobs, creating balanced jobs, empowering all workers, and also dignifying and balancing work in our own movements.

...participatory planning – including council infrastructure and democratic knowledge disbursement, social regulation of prices, expansion of qualitative descriptive information, enlargement of solidarity, placing human needs above profitability, democratizing budgets, winning more leisure and less labor, and also participatory allocation inside our movements.

...democratized and just international relations (which are the subject of many other ZNet Commentaries) including abolishing the World Bank, IMF, and WTO and instituting in their place democratic agencies subordinate to the will of local populations and seeking to regulate world trade and exchange to the benefit of the worst off participants.

All the above has been discussed in this series of parecon commentaries and now one final step concludes the series.

Suppose we adopt a participatory program encompassing all the above. What do we then

highlight as our central demand? What feature becomes the lynchpin of our efforts, the element that produces public visibility and widespread support? What is our version of “abolish slavery,” “get the vote,” “end the war,” “free my people”? What current demand within the broad program can best:

- (a) address needs that people currently feel
- (b) propel parecon consciousness-raising
- (c) empower people to seek still more, and
- (d) and galvanize people to win sought gains and simultaneously advance the encompassing broader program it is part of?

I am going to hazard a guess...very loosely and broadly, and obviously not refined.

We demand one quarter less work time for everyone, plus a parallel one quarter drop in wage and bonus income for the top quarter income earners in society (including an additional quarter profit tax on their income from capital), no change in total wage income for the middle half of society, and a one quarter raise in total wage income for the bottom quarter of society.

We demand overtime must be paid at twice the rate of normal time and firms cannot hire or maintain overtime workers while there are applicants for normal time labor.

We provide that anyone who wishes to work beyond three quarters of their current load can do so, but only in special employment programs initiated and paid by the government, administered locally by workers and consumers, and directed at improving local health care, education, social services, public housing, or other basic functions in poor communities where pay for this “surplus” work would be at twice the minimum wage (and the minimum wage, by the above requirements, would be two-thirds above what it was before this demand is won, until other pressures raise it still further).

We demand the government invest in social programs including: training the unemployed to fill newly open work positions, training folks in previously unemployed or unskilled jobs to take up higher skilled work left unattended by the reduction in workload of the currently well employed, oversight of the whole system in each workplace by unions and worker’s councils, the research and activism to pare away currently socially useless labor in advertising and similar worthless pursuits, and service work for those wanting to add their energies to advancing health care, education, social services, public housing, etc. The work reduction and income altering scenario releases – I think – more income than it hands out, assuming any resultant lost output is confined to useless and pointless products. But does the freed income (equal to one quarter of the current wages, bonuses, and profits of the top quarter income earners in society) fall short of the costs of the job program plus the costs of training? Perhaps, and if so, we then demand that the government reduce defense spending and spending on the prison industrial complex – and thereby free appropriate people to work in the real economy making up for lost hours and

funds needed to handle program expenses.

What would all this do?

Well, by reducing everyone's work time commitments by 25% it would greatly empower the public to have time to develop agendas of change and to fight for them. People can do this with their new found time either through the social programs by which they can also get additional income, or via volunteer movement activism.

The demands also dramatically redistribute income.

Even before derivative impact on bargaining power changes wages further, the top quarter earns wages at the same rate as before, though losing a quarter of their profit income and of course a quarter of their wages and bonuses due to reduced labor time. Yet even this group can be addressed about the benefits of the program not only in moral terms regarding the well being of others, but also because through the changes they will get more free time and will also enjoy many of the social benefits such as reduced hostility in society, increased public goods, and so on.

The next half of the population has a one-third hourly pay rate increase so that they earn the same amount as before but for three quarters the time spent at work. They therefore benefit from reduced work time, an increased hourly pay rate, from the social spending, and also from the changed balance of power between society's classes due to new found security, etc.

The bottom quarter of the population also spends three quarters the time spent before at work (though the unemployed of course increase their time at work), but now they get a quarter more total pay than before, which is a two thirds hourly pay increase. They also benefit most from the new social spending and changes in balance of power among society's classes.

Obviously the program directly immediately improves the condition of society's worst off, but, more, it diminishes and perhaps even eliminates unemployment thereby securing the weak against job threats by the strong, further empowering workers to take a still larger share of output as they solidify their new strength. The redirection of much labor to social programs also not only benefits the poorest constituencies in society directly, due to new schools, housing, etc, it also greatly empowers them, in turn leading to new demands for better wages and conditions and other social improvements. Likewise, efforts to replace highly skilled labor allotments reduced by a quarter for such jobs, uplifts other workers, eliminating barriers to entry to better tasks at work.

The supremely strategic aspect of the program is, I think, that at its heart is a core demand to work less hours, something that people at every level of our society think is warranted and desirable and which no one will be able to argue powerfully against. The rest of the program flows logically from the desire to reduce hours in ways most benefiting the worst off while improving the overall quality of society, rather than enriching only the powerful

and already privileged. In addition the program opens doors to issues of remuneration, power, job definition and allocation, and budgeting and broad valuations. The program, in other words, wins terrain that leaves folks not only immediately better off, but also more empowered and ready to struggle on.

When thinking about what might be a lynchpin of an economic campaign that would galvanize broad and deep support, I gravitated to demands about length of work time and associated income because my experiences suggest that time pressure is greatly felt, greatly despised, and a great barrier to radicalization...and therefore a great target for a massive campaign. The whole project just embellishes demanding thirty hours work for forty hours pay, and, I admit, even that simple demand, all by itself, even without diverse caveats and improvements, would be a wonderful centerpiece for a parecon movement. Embellished more or less as above, however, seeking a quarter less work time looks to me like a wonderful lightening rod, lynchpin, and foundation for struggle.